

7180 - Etiquette of naming children

the question

I want to give my son a name. What is the Islamic guidelines on this?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

No doubt the matter of giving names is one of the most important issues in people's lives, because a person's name is a title which says something about him, and is essential for communicating with him. It is an adornment and symbol for the person, by which he is called in this world and in the Hereafter. It is indicative of the religion to which he belongs, and makes him feel that he is one of the followers of that religion. It gives an impression of him to other people, and in their view it is like a garment - if it is too long or too short, it does not look right.

The basic principle concerning names is that they are permissible, but there are some matters which are prohibited according to sharee'ah and should be avoided when choosing names. These include the following:

-Enslavement to or worship of anything other than Allaah, including Prophets and angels. It is not permissible to be enslaved to or to worship anyone or anything other than Allaah at all. Among the names which express enslavement to or worship of anything other than Allaah are 'Abd al-Rasool ("slave of the Messenger"), 'Abd al-Nabi ("slave of the Prophet") and 'Abd al-Ameer (slave of the prince) and other names which imply worship of or submission to anything other than Allaah. The person who has a name like this must change it. The great Sahaabi 'Abd al-Rahmaan ibn 'Awf (may Allaah be pleased with him) said: My name was 'Abd 'Amr - or according to one report, 'Abd

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al-Ka'bah – and when I became Muslim, the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) called me 'Abd al-Rahmaan. (Narrated by al-Haakim, 3/306. Al-Dhahabi agreed with him)

-Names of Allaah which are befitting only for Him, may He be glorified, such as al-Khaaliq (the Creator), al-Raaziq (the Provider), al-Rabb (the Lord), al-Rahmaan (the Most Merciful), etc., which are names that befit only Allaah; names which describe attributes which are true only of Allaah, such as Malik al-Mulook (King of kings), al-Qaahir (the Subduer), etc. It is haraam to call people by these names, and they must be changed. Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning): “Do you know of any who is similar to Him?” [Maryam19:65].

-Names that belong exclusively to the kuffaar and are not used by anyone else, such as 'Abd al-Maseeh (“slave of the Messiah”), Butrous (Peter), Jurjus (George), and other names which denote religions of kufr.

-Names of idols and false gods which are worshipped instead of Allaah, such as naming someone after a devil and so on.

It is not permissible to call people after the names referred to above; indeed, doing so is haraam and anyone who has such a name is obliged to change it.

-It is makrooh (disliked) to use names which have off-putting meanings, either because the meaning is ugly or because it will provoke others to make fun of the person. Such names also go against the teaching of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), who commanded us to give beautiful names. Examples of such (objectionable) names include Harb (“war”), Rashaash (sprinkles or drizzle), and Hiyaam – which is the name of a disease suffered by camels – and other names which have ugly or unpleasant meanings.

-It is makrooh to use names which have alluring or provocative meanings. This happens a lot when

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it comes to naming girls, where some names are given which have sexual or provocative meanings.

-It is makrooh to deliberately name someone after immoral people such as singers and actors/actresses, etc. If they have good names, it is permissible to use those names, but it must be because of the meaning of the name and not because of the desire to imitate those people.

-It is makrooh to give names which have meanings that refer to sin, such as Saariq ("thief") or Zaalim ("wrongdoer"); or to give the names of Pharaohs or sinners, such as Fir'awn (Pharaoh), Haamaan (the name of Pharaoh's minister) and Qaaron.

-It is makrooh to use the names of animals which are well-known for their undesirable characteristics, such as al-Himaar (donkey), al-Kalb (dog), al-Qird (monkey), etc.

-It is makrooh to use any name which is added to the words "al-Deen" or "al-Islam" (i.e., names which appear in idaafah - genitive construction - with these words), such as Noor al-Deen ("light of the religion"), Shams al-Deen ("sun of the religion"), Noor al-Islam ("light of Islam"), Shams al-Islam ("sun of Islam"), etc., because these names give a person more than he deserves. The scholars of the Salaf disliked being given nicknames of this sort. Imaam al-Nawawi (may Allaah have mercy on him) disliked his nickname of Muhiy al-Deen ("reviver of the religion"); Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allaah have mercy on him) also disliked his nickname of Taqiy al-Deen ("piety of the religion"), and he used to say, "But my family gave me this nickname and it became well-known."

-It is makrooh to add any word to the name of Allaah except the word 'Abd (slave), as in 'Abd-Allaah (Abdullah). Example of this include Hasab-Allaah, Rahmat-Allaah (the mercy of Allaah), etc. It is similarly makrooh to add words to the word al-Rasool (the Messenger).

-It is makrooh to use the names of angels, or to call people after the names of soorahs in the

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Qur'aan, such as Ta-Ha, Yaa-Seen, etc. These names are al-Huroof al-Muqatta'ah (letters which appear at the beginning of some soorahs; their meaning is known only to Allaah – Translator), they are not names of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him). See Tuhfat al-Mawdood by Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allaah have mercy on him), p 109.

These names are makrooh, and it is makrooh to give them to anyone. But if a person has been given such a name by his family, and he is grown up and it is difficult for him to change it, he does not have to do so.

There are four categories of good names:

The first (best) category is the names 'Abd-Allaah and 'Abd al-Rahmaan. It was reported that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "The most beloved of names to Allaah are 'Abd-Allaah and 'Abd al-Rahmaan." (Narrated by Muslim in his Saheeh, 1398).

The second category is all the names which express enslavement to and worship of Allaah, such as 'Abd al-Azeez, 'Abd al-Raheem, 'Abd al-Malik, 'Abd al-Ilaah, 'Abd al-Salaam, etc.

The third category is the names of Prophets and Messengers – may the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon them. Undoubtedly the best and greatest of them is our Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him); the name Ahmad is also one of his names. Next come the names of the "Messengers of strong will" [cf. Al-Ahqaaf 46:35], namely Ibraaheem, Moosa, 'Eesa and Nooh (may the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon them), then the rest of the Prophets - may the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon them.

The fourth category is the names of righteous slaves of Allaah, above all the companions of our noble Prophet. It is mustahabb to use their names, following their example and hoping to reach a higher status.

The fifth category is any other good name which has a proper and pleasant meaning.

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It is good to pay attention to a number of matters when giving names to our children, including the following:

1. Recognizing the fact that this name will stay with the person for his entire lifetime, and it could cause some embarrassment or problems for him which in turn could make him feel badly towards his father, mother or whoever gave him this name.
2. When looking at names in order to choose one, we should look at it from a number of angles. We should look at the name itself, and also think of how it will sound when this person is a child, a youth, an adult, an old man and a father, and how it will suit his father to be called "Abu" (Father of) So and so, and how it will suit his son to be called Son and so son of So and so, etc.
3. Choosing the name is the right of the father, because he is the one after whom the child will be named (son of, or daughter of...). But it is mustahabb for the father to involve the mother in the decision and to ask for her opinion as to whether she thinks the name is good, so that she will feel happy.
4. The child must be named after his father even if the father is deceased or divorced, etc., even if he does not take care of the child or see him at all. It is utterly haraam to name a child after anyone other than his father, except in one case, which is when the child is born as the result of adultery (Allaah forbid). In this case the child should be named after his mother and it is not permissible to name him after his father.